

ATTRIBUTING 1787 MASSACHUSETTS CENTS

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The copper cents of Massachusetts are dated either 1787 or 1788. The devices are as follows: On the obverse is an Indian standing on a mound looking to his right. He holds a bow in his right hand and an arrow in his left. The word COMMON is before him and WEALTH behind. A small five pointed star is in the upper left field. The reverse is dominated by an eagle looking to its right. It holds a cluster of arrows in its left talon and an olive branch in its right (except in one instance). On its breast is a lined shield with cent spelled out across the top. A line or lines with the date below are beneath the eagle. The word MASSACHUSETTS extends around the top of the reverse. This word is always followed by a period for the cents of this year.

Both Mike and Tom think the reverses are generally easier to identify than the obverses, so they tend to attribute the reverses first to limit the obverse possibilities. We begin by identifying the dies used at the Massachusetts mint and then list the counterfeits contemporary to the times. All attributions below are by Ryder number.

Cents of 1787

Obverses

The key to beginning the identification of the obverses of the 1787 cents is the orientation of the star before the face. Think of the star as a man with his feet spread and his arms outstretched. The keys here are whether the right foot or left foot is lower (as you view the coin) and where a line along the tops of the star's "arms" would intersect the indian's head. After looking at the star to limit the possible varieties, then look at the secondary characteristics. These include the number of pleats on the indian's tunic, the characteristics of the lower ends of the pleats, and characteristics unique to specific varieties. The latter characteristics are designated as (*diagnostic*) for that die.

Obverse 2--The star rests solidly on both feet. The pleat of the Indian's tunic nearest the bow sharply shifts direction toward the belt at its midpoint (*diagnostic*). It reminds one of a "boomerang". There are 7 pleats in the tunic. The pleat nearest the arrow is shorter than the rest. The center pleat fills the gap between the indian's thighs. The bow rests on the toe of the indian's moccasin, not on the mound (*diagnostic*). This obverse is paired with reverse

dies A, C, E, F, and G.

Obverse 3--The star is lower on its right side and points to the bridge of the Indian's nose (*diagnostic*). There are 9 pleats in the tunic. The right-most is thin, ends short of the others and does not touch the belt (*diagnostic*). A thorn-like die chip extends from the indian's right forearm and points toward his right shoulder (*diagnostic*). The bow string is somewhat distant from the bow handle (*diagnostic*). The bow rests on the mound. Most we have seen have a period-like rust pit to the left of the C in COMMON. This die is paired with reverse die G.

Obverse 4--The star is very slightly lower on its right side and points to the mid forehead. There are 9 pleats in the tunic, but this is often hard to tell because the pleats to your right quickly wear into the belt. The pleat closest to the bow is short, and the one next to it is long (*diagnostic*). The bow rests on the outside of the mound (*diagnostic*). Indian's head is bowed (*diagnostic*). There is no engraver's line for the indian's right shoulder and front of the neck and its hair does not quite touch its left shoulder, the making the indian's head seem to float above his body (*diagnostic*). This die is paired with reverse dies C, D, and J of 1787 and was used as obverse die 17 in 1788.

Obverse 6--The star is lower on its left side and points over the indian's head. There are 7 pleats in the tunic and the gap between the third and fourth pleats from your left extends the gap between the indian's legs (*diagnostic*). The tip of the higher barb on the arrow head ends even with the bottom of the closest pleat (*diagnostic*). The bottom of the bow touches the mound. This die is paired with reverse die G and was used for 1788 cents as obverse die 12.

Obverse 8--This die is similar to obverse die 6 at first glance but is different in several easily identifiable ways. As with die 6, the star is lower on its left side and points over the indian's head. The tunic has 7 pleats with the one closest to the arrow being especially thick, giving the indian a "hippy" look on that side. The bottom of the bow ends well above the indian's moccasin and the mound (*diagnostic*). The feathered end of the arrow ends under the middle of the E in WEALTH, not under or to the left of the upright as the other die varieties do (*diagnostic*). The end of the collar extends into the field below the indian's chin (*diagnostic*). The tip of the higher barb on the arrowhead is lower than the bottom of the tunic pleats, but higher than on varieties 2, 3, and 4. This die is paired with reverse die G.

There are 3 contemporary counterfeit obverse dies for 1787. All have stars that are lower on their left sides. The bottommost arrows on the reverses are all 30° above the horizontal or higher (*diagnostic*) and the stem on the branch is cut, rather than ending with a leaf

(*diagnostic*). All these counterfeits are R-7.

Obverse 1--The tunic has 7 pleats. The bow rests on the mound. The bow extends well away from the bowstring on either side of the bow handle. The Indian leans forward and his jaw juts out pronouncedly (*diagnostic*). There is no shoulder/neck line under the jaw, but there is one from his left shoulder. The arm holding the arrow bends back sharply at the wrist (*diagnostic*). The right side of the W in WEALTH ends 3/4 of the way towards the top and the E in WEALTH lacks the middle extension (*both diagnostic*). This die is paired with reverse die B.

Obverse 5--The tunic has 6 pleats. The bow rests on the indian's foot. There is a tall, thick tuft of grass extending upward into the field near the toe of the indian's right foot (*diagnostic*). The side of the tunic nearest the arm holding the arrow is an almost straight line from the bottom of the rightmost pleat to the indian's underarm (*diagnostic*). The top of the indian's head is nearly flat. He has a hefty waist. The letters COM are very weakly struck and wear quickly. This die is paired with reverse dies I of 1787 and J of 1788.

Obverse 7--The tunic has 7 pleats. The bow ends near the top of the indian's moccasin, and some weak marks run from the bottom of the bow to the mound just left of the indian's foot (*diagnostic*). There are noticeable rust pits on the outer pleat to your left, below and just outside that pleat, and a larger one between the bottom of the strong part of the bow and the indian's knee (*diagnostic*). The top barb on the arrowhead almost touches the outer pleat (*diagnostic*). The C of COMMON has a large serif that slants slightly toward the center of the letter and almost closes that letter and the serif on the center bar of the E in WEALTH runs from the northwest to southeast (*both diagnostic*). This die is paired with reverse die H.

Reverses

The key points of the reverse dies are the relation of the bottommost arrow to the period after MASSACHUSETTS, the number of leaves on the branch, the spacing and shapes of the leaves, whether there are one or two lines above the date, and, if two, which is longer or heavier, and the spacing of the date. Some dies have individual characteristics that are unique to that die. These are designated as (*diagnostic*).

Reverse A--**The Horned Eagle variety** (*diagnostic*). The bottommost arrow is almost horizontal, above the period, and extends slightly beyond the period (*diagnostic*). There are 5 leaves on the branch, 4 outside the talon and 1 inside. The wing-tip does not touch the leaf below. MAS, especially the MA,

are widely spaced (*diagnostic*). There are 2 lines above the date. The lower is longer and thicker. The date is evenly spaced. None of the numerals in the date are high or low. This die is paired with obverse die 2.

Die states. This die exhibits a die break from the eagle's head through the left lower serif of the H above and several areas of die rust. In early die states, the rust is most noticeable between the lines above the date and the M in MASSACHUSETTS and behind the eagle's head. In later die states it is noticeable in the fields and lettering, especially on the lower half of the coin. The die break is known in numerous die states. It begins as a short, diagonal crack, or nub, rising from the eagle's forehead just left and above of the eyeball. It turns right as a horizontal crack, rises diagonally to the left, enters the bottom of the H at the center of the left upright, exits at the juncture of the left upright and the lower left serif, and rises diagonally to a level even with the bottom of the H's crossbar. The die break then becomes thicker to the left as the die deteriorates. It first thickens below the H, then both above and below the H, and then again below the H. We have never seen an example of this variety without some vestige of the die break.

Reverse C--The bottommost arrow is slightly below the horizontal and touches the period (*diagnostic*). There are 6 leaves on the branch, 5 outside the talon and 1 inside (as on most reverse dies for this year). The lone leaf inside the talon is close to the upper line above the date (*diagnostic*). The SS of MASSACHUSETTS are widely spaced (*diagnostic*). There are 2 lines above the date, with the lower being the heavier, longer on the left and shorter on the right. The 17 of the date are relatively widely spaced (*diagnostic*). The 8 is high, almost touching the lower line, and leans slightly to the left. This die is paired first with obverse dies 4 and then 2.

Die states. This die come perfect. Late in its pairing with obverse die 4 it develops a small, weak break (really a buckling of the die) that extends from the rim at K-8:30 to the upper right serif in the letter M. This break is apparent on the earliest strikes with obverse die 2. Later, series of small planchet laminations extend from the rim just right of the base of the first 7 in the date through the 7, 1, left end of the lower line over the date, and into the field where they stop just short of the M in MASSACHUSETTS. Eventually, this series of seemingly random small island-type breaks join into one longer break of varying thicknesses.

Reverse D--The bottommost arrow is well below the horizontal and points below the period (*diagnostic*). There are 6 leaves on the branch, 5 outside the talon and 1 inside. The spiked tips on the second leaf atop the branch and the leaf at the end of the branch point toward each other (*diagnostic*). The single leaf inside the eagle's talon touches one of the tail feathers (*diagnostic*). There are two

lines above the date, but they overlap and appear to be a single line except at the right end where the upper line is slightly longer than the lower. The date is evenly spaced and below the lines. The tops of the 7s, especially the first, are lower on the right, which makes the 8 look a little high. This die is paired with obverse die 4.

Die states. All but one I have seen have are perfect die states. The one exception had a short die break from the rim to the bottom left corner of the second 7. A second break (perhaps an extension of the first) begin about one-fourth the way up the right side of the diagonal and extends on a slight curve in the lower right field where it exits the rim just before the last S. [Eliasberg I, lot 88]

Reverse E--The bottommost arrow is slightly above the horizontal and points at the period (*diagnostic*). There are 6 leaves on the branch, 5 outside the talon and 1 inside. A long spike exits from the branch between the leaf at the end of the stem and the leaf just below and almost reaches the wing tip (*diagnostic*). This spike shrinks as the die wears. CH and TTS are widely spaced (*diagnostic*). There are two lines above the date with the lower much heavier. The date is spaced 17 87 and the 87 are high with the serif on the 7 touching the lower line. This die is paired with obverse die 2.

Die states. Known perfect. The die buckles early from the center through the right side of the upright of the final T to the rim. At first, this buckling is apparent as a slight swelling that becomes more pronounced as the die is used. Eventually the die breaks with a thin crack from the rim to the top of the second T and a thick crack (several die states) from the bottom of that T to the eagle's wing.

Reverse F--The Transposed Arrows Variety (*diagnostic*). Unlike all other Massachusetts variety, the eagle holds a leafed branch in its left talon and arrows in its right. There are 6 leaves on the branch, 5 above the talon and 1 below. The arrows are pretty tightly bunched with the bottommost pointing at the inside of the outer feather on the wing well above its tip. The arrow closest to the eagle's knee touches or almost touches it. The tail feathers are closely bunched and their outer edges form almost straight lines (*diagnostic*). The feather tip nearest the M in MASSACHUSETTS ends under the junction of the diagonals (*diagnostic*). There is a doubled line above the date with the upper line being longer and slightly thicker. The date is more closely spaced than on any other 1787 reverse and the 8 is high and leans slightly left (*diagnostic*). This die is paired with obverse die 2. The letters "CENT" are raised on the shield (*diagnostic*) and wear very quickly.

Note of warning. Very deceptive copies of this die exist. Many copies are

electros in VF. Be sure you look all around the edge for any signs of a seam and for any sign of lead showing through the copper. We **strongly** encourage you to have this variety authenticated. Preferably get the dealer to do it. If the dealer refuses, get a guarantee in writing that he or she will refund your purchase price if the coin is not genuine. Then have the coin authenticated yourself.

Reverse G--The bottommost arrow is slightly above horizontal and ends above the period. There is a graver scratch that enters and exits the wing just opposite the third arrow from the bottom (*diagnostic*). The shaft of the topmost arrow is thick and separated from the shaft of the adjoining arrow (*diagnostic*). The branch has 6 leaves, 5 outside the talon and 1 inside. The 2 leaves on top of the branch and the leaf at the end of the branch all point up and their tips are almost aligned with the leaf tip at the end of the branch being slightly low (*diagnostic*). A single bar covers the date which is spaced 17 8 7 (*diagnostic*). The top of the 1 is lower than the tops of the other numerals. This die is paired with obverse dies 2, 3, 6, and 8.

Reverse J--The bottommost arrow is very, very slightly above the horizontal. The arrow points over, but ends just short of the period. The second arrow from the bottom is long and almost touches the final S (*diagnostic*). The branch has 6 leaves, 5 outside the talon and 1 inside. The branch ends in a double leaf (*diagnostic*). The first leaf below the branch almost touches the left foot of the M in MASSACHUSETTS (*diagnostic*). The leaf inside the talon points down vertically (*diagnostic*). There are two lines above the date and the top one is heavier (*diagnostic*). The 17 in the date are close, the 8 leans left and the serif of the second 7 just touches the line above (*diagnostic*). This die is paired with obverse die 4.

There are also three contemporary counterfeit dies which Ryder numbered. The reverses of all three have bottommost arrows that are angled well above the horizontal and branch ends that have cut stems rather than leaves.

Reverse B--The bottommost arrow has twin barbs and points well above the horizontal. The shaft of the topmost arrow curves left (*diagnostic*). The period lies just right of the lower curve of the final S (*diagnostic*). The tips of the 5 lower arrows lie close to the wing and form an almost straight line (*diagnostic*). The shafts above the eagle's talon are evenly spaced (*diagnostic*) which occasionally makes it easy to identify this die as the host coin for the 1788 CONNECTICUT 16.3-N. There are 4 leaves on the branch, all outside the talon. The end of the branch is a cut stem that lies just below the outside of the leftmost tail feather (*diagnostic*). Both the left side and right side of the

tail form straight lines (*diagnostic*). The sides of the wide "V" of the tail formed by the tail feather tips are straight lines (*diagnostic*). The farthest lower leaf touches the wingtip (*diagnostic*) and the closer lower leaf ends midway between the feet of the M (*diagnostic*). There is a double line above the date with the lower longer and heavier. The date is pretty evenly spaced with the 1 leaning to the right and both 7s high (*diagnostic*). This die is paired with obverse die 1.

Reverse H--The bottommost arrow is well above the horizontal and ends about 60 percent of the way between the wing tip and the period. There are 5 leaves on the branch, all outside the talon. The stem of the branch is thicker inside the talon than outside and ends left of and below the tip of the leftmost lower tail feather. The first 2 leaves above the branch are almost vertical and the first almost touches the eagle's knee (*diagnostic*). The first lower leaf points at the inside serif of the left upright of the M and the second lower leaf points at the outside serif of the right upright of that letter (*diagnostic*). CHU of MASSACHUSETTS are widely spaced as are the TS (*diagnostic*). There is a single line above the date. The date is spaced 1 7 87 (*diagnostic*), with the final 7 high and touching the line (*diagnostic*). This die is paired with obverse die 7.

Reverse I--The bottommost arrow points well above the horizontal. The lower barb on the second bottommost arrow touches the point of the arrow below, creating a line that joins the ends of these two arrows (*diagnostic*). This short line points at the wingtip. The period is distant from both the final S and the arrows and lies under and just to the right of the arrow point on the bottommost arrow. There are 5 leaves on the branch, all outside the talon. The stem of the branch thickens and ends left and slightly below the tip of the leftmost tail feather. The three leaves above the branch are long and their tips are aligned (*diagnostic*). The SACH of MASSACHUSETTS are very weakly struck (*diagnostic*). The single line above the date is distant from the tail feathers. The evenly spaced numerals in the date crowd the line above, but do not touch it. All the numerals in the date are the same length (*diagnostic*). The 8 leans to the right. This die is paired with obverse die 5.

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Die Combinations and Rarities of 1787 Cents

Variety	Rarity
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2-A	3-
2-C	5
2-E	5
2-F	6+
2-G	7
3-G	3

Variety	Rarity
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4-C	5-
4-D	4-
4-J	7+
6-G	4
8-G	6+

Counterfeits	
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Variety	Rarity
1-B	7+
5-I	7+
7-H	7-